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# The intergenerational mix

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# The intergenerational mix

*“One of the most original men I know used to be left as a very small child to care for his immobilized but alert grandfather, and they spent long hours talking together. Today, at sixty-five, he is one of the most inspired futurists I know. He learned how to think about the future from his grandfather who, sitting helpless in a wheelchair, had time for endless speculative entrancing conversations. And today young people swarm around him wherever he goes. So the felicity of a contract that occurred sixty-three years ago is carried on and recreated today!”*

Margaret Mead  
*Grandparents as Educators*



# Acknowledgments

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The idea for this publication came from Mr. Wilson McCue, Special Projects Consultant with the Recreational Services Unit of the Ministry of Culture and Recreation who saw the need for a resource exploring the area of recreation and the intergenerational experience. The author is grateful for his guidance.

Mr. James Rehill, Health Services Department of Stouffville Secondary School and member of the Ontario Advisory Council of Senior Citizens of Ontario, provided innumerable examples of seniors and others working together in the field of education.

The Senior Citizens Centres Association of Ontario, through Miss Kathie Durst, Director of the Waterloo Community Centre, provided a wealth of information about the intergenerational approach to recreation.

Sister St. Michael and Sister Constance of the Canadian Institute of Religion and Gerontology explained the present involvement of the churches. Many interesting studies, articles and outlines of programs were investigated including Dr. Margaret Mead's concept of the whole experience which greatly contributed to the quality of our intent.

The author wishes to express appreciation to all those who were so ready to share their interests, information and ideas.

Hope Holmested

*Miss Holmested is the immediate past chairman of the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior citizens and was chairman of the First Canadian Conference on Aging in 1966.*

# Preface

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A new concept of intergenerational opportunities is sweeping the country—opportunities in the family, in schools, in libraries and in other areas, but particularly among the young and the old who have many common concerns.

The Ministry of Culture and Recreation felt it was important to take a look at some of these ideas and the programs that are evolving because of them—and felt this would be of real interest to people of all ages but particularly those concerned with lack of communication between generations in our present-day society.

This booklet helps to explain the concept of intergenerational living in some of its many aspects.

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# Generations – down with the barriers

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For many people, intergenerational mixing has gone out of fashion. Clinging to your peers has become more prevalent. So how can different generations get together for recreation and to fill their leisure time? Perhaps more to the point, why would they want to? What is the purpose?

The purpose is this: the mixing of generations lets people experience a little more of what life is about. There is little to risk and very much to be gained. Each generation can contribute its own unique approach, its own attitude and experience that can create a deeper understanding and empathy.

There has been a growing recognition in the past few years that the young and old are suffering from the same frustrations and feelings of rejection. They understand each other's feelings of alienation so they have much to give each other. There are many opportunities for sharing: in the home, in schools, in recreation centres, churches, synagogues and libraries—and through individual interaction.

There are many ways in which people of various ages can enjoy times of recreation, leisure and just plain living together for mutual enjoyment and satisfaction, but a new way of communicating must be found or contact will be lost. In this computer age time is of the essence. What can we do to help the generations understand one another? How can we improve communication?

The new generation of older adults are real pioneers in the use of leisure time, and many of them are looking for ways to share their skills with the family and community.

Grandparents, real or adopted, need to show their concern for the young as a vital and living force.

But what about the generations in between? The pressures in their lives often alienate them, rather than creating mutual support. These people are building and maintaining

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their own lives. They are concerned with their children. They are also concerned with the growing needs of their parents who, when ill, often reverse roles, becoming dependent rather than giving support. Then the middle generations with two-way pressures often become alienated or overprotective.

Much can be done to break through the barrier of the generations to encourage the exchange of feelings, to provide a system of support and the mutual enjoyment of varied experience. In the past, functions such as the church social provided the opportunity for everyone from the youngest child to the oldest grandparent to share a mutual happy experience. Ironically, modern technology has made society more mobile but has produced segregation and a lack of communication among the generations.

Weighing these values and losses, we need to build new securities and enrich life at all ages. It is a tremendous and imaginative task to break attitudinal boundaries and replace them with a total life concern; to build new ways, new opportunities and new pleasure in being together as a community. The futurists are thinking and planning for it. There is a new need for contact and communication. An open mind and dedication are all we really need to create a socialization that is totally unrelated to age.



# People and places

## The family

There may be a number of generations in your family. Are your children lucky enough to have grandparents to love them; to tell them stories about the old days, the old ways and customs; to give them roots and a sense of belonging?

Family time must be planned today: it doesn't just happen naturally. The pressures of work, social life and everyday chores squeeze out the intangible but often demanding needs of children. Having time together where all generations are listened to—and loved as important people—can be planned successfully.

Children's early years are a time for doing things together, creating mutual trust and affection, bringing a sense of support and security as well as developing active and creative minds. "What would you like to do this week?" may bring out hidden wishes. The hockey game, the zoo, or 101 unexpected things may be suggested. Planned time should involve planning by the whole family and, whenever possible, grandparents should be a part of these plans.

Grandparents have a wealth of knowledge, experience and skills. They will appreciate the opportunity to be a contributing part of the family and will be delighted to be part of the fun.

The Block Parent service in many areas now includes grandparents. This means the children get security and the grandparents get an opportunity to give service as family and community members.

Parent-teacher associations might well have grandparents included in their memberships. It would let them know what is going on and allow them to help out when a need arises. Grandparents are a real resource and their skills in belonging and loving are all of key importance in inter-generational planning.

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Once you begin to plan, there is no limit to the ideas that develop!

Children often have too many material things to compensate for the time when the family is not around, but material things really do not fill this void. Children need parents, grandparents, family counsellors and teachers to give them this sense of family.

## The library

Libraries are often focal points of social life, as are churches, clubs and community centres. This is particularly true in smaller communities.

The library is a natural place for intergenerational programs. It has great potential as a gathering place for *all* ages but particularly for seniors because of their need for daytime programs.

Seniors have much to give in planning and carrying out programs—telling stories of the past to children, demonstrating crafts, etc., and teaching skills. The library display cases can be used to advantage to show what can be done. Travelling exhibitions of books attract special interest. Seniors frequently write about various parts of the province in the early days and the changes that have come about. They are a rich resource for historians.

## Educational institutions

Intergenerational learning is one of the exciting new fields opening today. More and more schools are recognizing the close bond between young and old and are offering a variety of opportunities for the mixing of different age groups.

The newsletter *Especially for Seniors* is published by the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens. It asked the seniors what skills they had to offer in helping others

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learn, and suggestions poured in. Teaching older and younger people had high priority, as had hobbies and skills. This is literally an untapped resource of tremendous ideas.

New ideas and opportunities are developing in many reciprocal ways. Seniors are helping slow learners in the schools, teaching special-interest groups, sharing many of their experiences and putting the past into historical perspective.

Schools are sharing extra space with seniors for their particular activities. Students often adopt grandparents and bring them into the school's celebrations. You name it—it's happening somewhere.

The generations are enjoying each other's company, learning from each other and sharing their skills and interests. Often the middle-aged generations in between are not accepted in the role of leader or teacher, so this helps the younger and the older generations to assume leadership roles. This expertise is always needed and, if they have empathy and understanding, they will quickly provide new opportunities for learning.

The futurists predict a society where age is not considered, only need, and where we are involved with the whole of life and living.

## **Churches and synagogues**

For many people there is a tremendous feeling of belonging and security in being a member of a church or synagogue. Today, as our expected supports fail, many individuals (perhaps older adults particularly) find the continued involvement in church activity a sustaining force in their lives.

The Church is seeking new ways of bringing support and security to all members of the congregation. It is developing ways to meet social as well as spiritual needs, in many cases creating a real feeling of family: grandparents, parents and children.

It is encouraging, too, that churches feel a real responsibility for their older members. Often provision is made to take them to church if they have no means of transportation. In some denominations, a full maintenance service is provided to cover heavy chores, making it possible for older people to remain in their own homes. The young help the old and establish friendships.

Church youth groups have invited young people from other parishes to receive training in understanding old people's needs so that they can do volunteer work in seniors' homes and in nursing homes.

There are many opportunities for involvement within women's and men's groups for all ages.

The Canadian Institute of Religion and Gerontology is beginning a study of "You and Your Older Parent", requested by children of elderly parents who want to help but realize that they have a lot to learn about the later years.

Special ways of using the older member's knowledge need to be found: helping in the kindergarten class, meeting the children as they come to Sunday school, and teaching. If older people are not involved, then a rich resource is wasted.

Churches and synagogues can provide opportunities for study and involvement which can help involve participants in social interaction with the congregation as a whole.

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## **Civic, community and senior centres**

Centres are a phenomenon of our time and offer a tremendous range of opportunities for people to come together. A place to meet is a necessity and until such centres were developed one had to have a special interest or belong to an organization or church to meet others in the community.

**Civic** centres as they now exist cater to the needs and wishes of the community. The space they occupy may range from government-owned to all sorts of other space offering events and opportunities that everyone can enjoy.

**Community** centres have programs for all ages and provide an opportunity for the generations to meet in a place they all share. They put the emphasis on mutual rather than segregated participation.

**Senior** centres generally exclude the younger generations but there is now a move to push back age requirements so younger adults are coming and bringing their skills and leadership expertise for the benefit of the centre. Retirement, not age, is the criterion. Slowly the doors are opening and an intergenerational mix may begin to emerge as the programs and interests of the members expand. The recreational and health aspects of senior centres offer a tremendous help to people by providing a feeling of belonging and support.



# What is time for, anyway?

## Recreation and leisure

Recreation is an accepted value in our society, an expression of joy in doing and being, and an exploration of new ways to bring satisfaction into living.

We need to value and revalue our use of time, our opportunities for physical and mental team work in our active and inactive leisure-time pursuits.

There is something for everyone and often there are pleasant surprises, as our Handicapped Olympic Team showed by their outstanding performances.

Wise planners think of every contingency in hobbies, in active and passive sports and in meeting and mixing with their own and other generations. The all-eggs-in-one-basket planner, if dedicated to excel in one sport, finds there is nothing to fall back on if accidents prevent a further pursuit of that dream. There must always be something to go forward to in life, no matter what the human condition.

All ages can enjoy some type of sport or activity, often together, each age offering its own particular expertise.

The opportunities are endless and the extra pleasure experienced in creating and being with other age groups is being recognized.

## Leisure—the intergenerational way

By creating a change of pace, leisure can give another dimension to your life. Even greater dimensions open up, however, when several generations get involved in the same pursuits. For instance, watching and learning about the stars, nature, birds and flowers can bring you infinite pleasure but your knowledge can be shared with others and passed on from generation to generation.

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Leisure is that special commodity “extra time” in which you can be alone, be with your peers, or with others of all ages. Some older people feel that they have *too much* leisure and perhaps they need the stimulation of young people to help them get involved. Leisure can be painting, travel (arm chair or whizzing around the world), sculpture, repair jobs, a sleep in the sun, a walk by the shore, listening to music, anything and everything you want to do. This could also include writing, an activity that needs time, study and exploration. Older people have the past in their hands and can give it to future generations, and hundreds of seniors are doing just that.

The key to real appreciation of leisure is to use it wisely, no matter what your age.

## Creativity

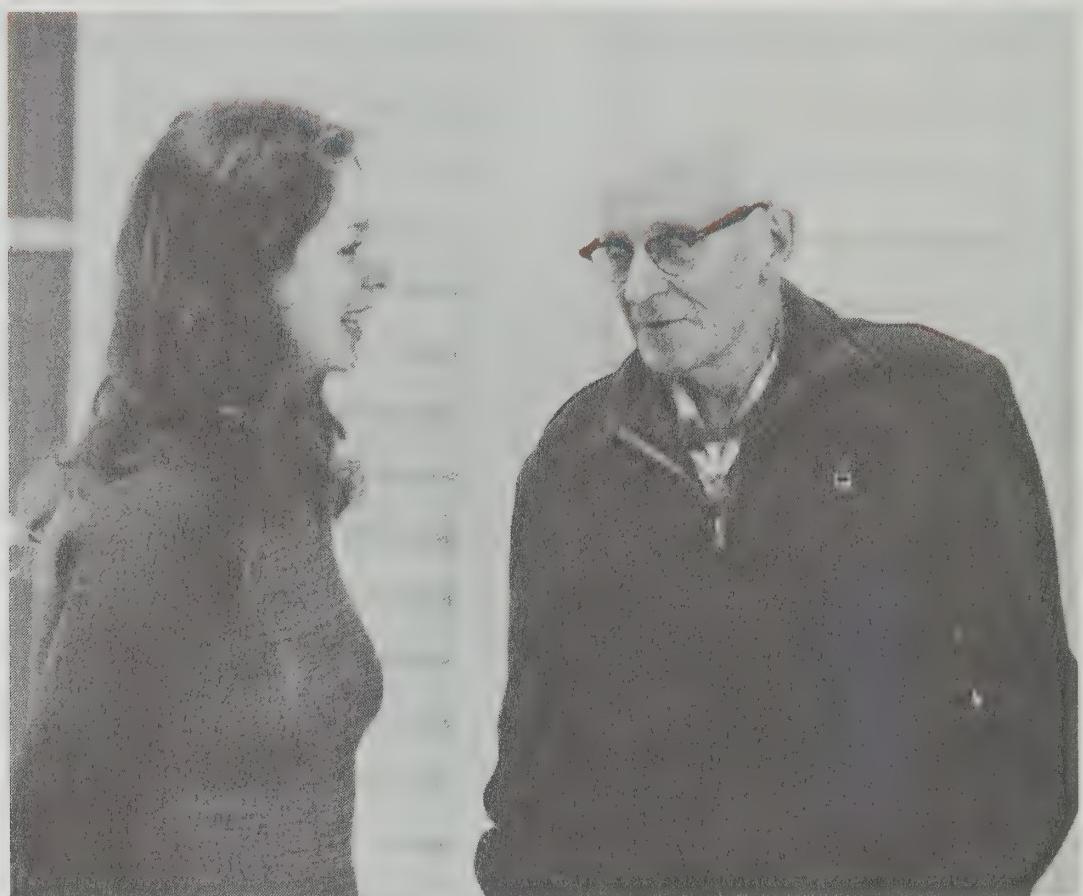
People can be creative at any age. In his book *Creativity in the later years*, Dr. J. McLeish stirs the mind, loosens the imagination and moves one to action. He says that one can be creative until the last day of life. You can be creative in what you are, what you do, and in how you do it. Those who create can bestow lasting benefits too. For instance, a quadriplegic veteran of World War II originated the idea for the first bus for wheelchairs. His vision turned into reality and this way of getting about has evolved into Wheel-Trans, a method of transportation that gives freedom of movement to handicapped people of all ages.

There are courses in creativity available to all ages. These courses will help show the way to a more exciting life of the mind and help combat the harsh realities of life. This is intergenerational living at its best. No age barriers exist and the exchange and sharing of ideas is exciting as creativity often comes in surprising packages.

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*Fox Fire* (a series of books masterminded by a frantic school teacher) is an excellent example of intergenerational creativity which brought a new way of learning and a new sense of pride to the students and involved the whole community.

Intergenerational programs call for a creative approach. Each generation has been shut into its own compartment in life for so long that it takes imagination to break down the doors. Doing and being calls for an expenditure of yourself but this can open up a whole new world for you.



## **Opportunities for seniors to become involved**

Why not ask a senior to do it? Just as they did when they were young. Help destroy the myth that you don't have a skill because you are older. Seniors may be a bit rusty but their skills can enhance the quality of life for all concerned.

Changes are occurring in the work force and the changes involve both the paid and unpaid. Women are working outside the home and pressures in the work force and at home are building up. There is a lot to do and few people to do it. Many seniors would welcome a chance to take part in community life either as a volunteer or part-time paid employee. Seniors are an untapped resource waiting in the wings.

Some opportunities now exist for senior involvement. Many programs (funded and unfunded) are in operation, creating new opportunities, enthusiasm and excitement for planners and doers alike. We need new ideas. If you get in a rut you are dead and the intergenerational concept brings new life to planning. Here are some of the opportunities for involvement.

- CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency):  
Volunteers help in underdeveloped countries, expenses paid.
- The new apprenticeship programs now being developed in the Ontario Ministry of Education provide opportunities for seniors (either leaving the work force or already retired) to do training or consulting work on a shorter-hour basis, a natural use of talent.
- Senior Volunteers in Public Service are helping seniors in communities of less than 2,500 residents. Out-of-pocket expenses paid up to \$60.

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- The VIP Programs under the Volunteer Service Bureau in Toronto recreate, train and place senior volunteers, preferably in groups, in hospitals, schools and with new Canadians. A meal or cost of transportation is included upon request.
  - The Link program offers a talent exchange, basically for seniors but children and adults are welcome to join.
  - The Talent Bank started by the Alumni of the Toronto University offers a wide range of help, not only to the university but to the community.

All these services provide a natural intergenerational flow of seniors into the life of the community, where they play a natural role of help and support.

# Programs that work

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## Family

There is an excellent resource book called *A Revolutionary Old Idea* written by Grady Natt and priced at \$2.00 U.S. funds, which is available from Family Time, PO Box 1000, Des Plaines, Illinois, 60018. It gives a series of ideas for families who want help in planning—simple workable ideas that are fun to carry out together.

## Library

Several progressive libraries have given particular opportunities to the older adult, as well as opportunities for programs that appeal to the generations in between. Daytime programs are most appreciated by the seniors. One particular program suggested by a librarian and run and planned by seniors opened its doors to all ages and an intergenerational mix has naturally resulted.

There is little doubt that all generations enjoy good speakers, discussions, and films, and it is a natural coming-together of interested people. The topics are endless. The mutual enjoyment and opportunity to read more on the subjects add a real bonus for those who like people and those who like to read.

Many libraries have also opened their doors to several new learning programs planned by seniors for seniors who have requested library space, librarians' help with book lists and visual equipment. This type of use of a community resource is particularly valuable in small towns, as is the book delivery service by volunteers to the homebound.

## Educational institutions

At Loyalist Collegiate in Kingston 580 students and 470 seniors are involved in a mutual-helping plan. The Senior Citizens Advisory Committee and the students work together to develop ideas for mutual help. There are many

courses in the school for seniors and many ways of helping in classroom learning. Over 50 types of services are provided by the students after hours, sometimes for a minimal charge. The middle grouping of this intergenerational mix helps with the planning. The media is involved and takes part by letting everyone know what is available.

The Stouffville Secondary School has given tremendous leadership in bringing seniors and students together. The whole program is incorporated under physical education and health. A program on aging involves older people from the community, from a home for the aged and from a nursing home. This leads the way to many mutual activities including taping of life experiences of seniors by the students, assistance by seniors in programs on aging, and a Hand-in-Hand program where students give service even in school hours. The program is planned and administered by a fourth-year student each year.

**Substitute Grannies:** This program was started by the Hospital for Sick Children because long-term patients from far away receive few visitors on a regular basis. The surrogate grandparent has two children for two hours, five days a week. The change in the children is remarkable and their happiness is apparent.

Some seniors with skills would like to offer them to the community. This particular list shows the range of their interests and abilities.

In Niagara Region two nursing homes are involved. One provides tutoring for the fast learners, with the children being bussed from the schools. The other runs a nursery school, using the large rooms and giving the children a chance to see what it is like to have a grandparent.

In Windsor a program called SAGE (Senior Aid Guide Education) in three separate schools, demonstrates the value of individual instruction by seniors.

While the foregoing programs are in Ontario, the *Fox Fire* experiment in the Appalachian Mountains in the southern United States has a unique flavor. The students refused to learn so a teacher in desperation started a program where the students learned and recorded the lives, superstitions and knowledge of their parents and grandparents. This resulted in the publication of the *Fox Fire* books and a newspaper. Both have been money-making projects and have created an awareness and appreciation for the old ways of life as well as an excellent knowledge of how to run a business.

Continuing education in colleges and universities opens many doors. Low or free tuition (sometimes on a limited number basis) and an extraordinary range of subjects attract those who are anxious to learn at any age. *Creativity in the Adult Years*, an evening class at the University of Toronto, for example, draws students ranging from 18 to 75 (at least). It is a beautiful intergenerational mix where shared ideas are the key to learning.

## **Civic, community and senior centres**

An adult recreation centre in Waterloo has achieved an interesting mix of people of all ages and interests. During the day, 40 is the minimum age and people belong who are up to and over the age of 90. The younger retiree is a new breed and is giving real leadership in planning and carrying on programs. The very limited staff makes it necessary for everyone to become involved and it is a very happy place with everyone laughing and enjoying themselves.

An extensive recreational program is carried on during the day. Day-care participants come in for two days with a hot lunch. These members look after the plants in the centre. A mental health group of all ages comes in for a morning session, and members of the centre raise money for special events for them. A home support service is carried on as well, providing inside and outside help in the home.

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Small repairs are done for a limited charge by some men in the centre; the recipient pays for the material needed.

Forty-two community organizations with members of all ages use the centre in the evenings, and many of the daytime members join these as well. It is a three-generation centre.

There are frequent meetings for the children and their parents. Often the children are in their 50s and they discuss their varied mutual concerns.

Many of the older members knit gloves, scarves and caps for a school they have adopted.

The centre encourages change in ways of thinking and doing things, and few members continue in a rut for long. Something is always happening.

There is a lecture series for the "contemporary aging adult". The series deals with many topics such as pollution, energy, the metric system and other subjects pertinent to life in today's world.

Frequent workshops for leadership training are given at the centre for those upgrading and increasing their skills.

A Car Wash Day to raise money for the Big Sisters saw the seniors advertising the service, taking in the money and cooking hot dogs, while the children washed the cars.

A Junior-Senior Olympic Night produced an exciting competition with all sorts of games and the usual hot dogs to round out the evening.

The centre maintains a close liaison with city hall who has just published an excellent planning guide giving the step-by-step development process for a program such as theirs:

A Guide to Intergenerational Programming for You  
City Hall, PO Box 337  
Marsland Centre  
Waterloo, Ontario N2J 4A8

The centre is open as a drop-in centre on Saturdays, and a Sunday program is available once a month.

The 1,300 members are part of the community. The centre helps them to experience change as well as mutual enjoyment with other generations.

## Recreation and leisure

Some imaginative activities do happen right now, even in Junior Hockey. In one family, for instance, the child plays hockey; the parents watch and drive; the grandfather helps the children and takes care of the supplies and safety at the club; the grandmother watches hockey on TV, and heated discussion is an intergenerational pleasure.



The Activity Park programs allow all ages to enjoy measured activity set to their capabilities of performance and are an enormous amount of fun.

Wilderness camps now welcome participants of all ages and abilities, rather than making age the criterion.

An activity and games evening offered weekly by the seniors of Union Villa has had an enormous response from Grade II to IV children, and the enrolment is steadily growing.

A doctor who retired to the country began to recognize the enormous number of old-time crafts being done in the village and the indifference of the children. At an open house for families held once a week in his home, craft evenings and learning sessions are now a way of life. Everyone gets into the act and has a marvellous time.

A learning resource centre offers craft programs to children and their parents, their grandparents or their baby sitters.

Curling, bowling, skiing and golf are forms of recreation that have an appeal for all ages.

## Creativity

Some years ago when two thirds of our province was farm land, the King Township women, young and old, had no central place to meet and no way of earning a little money. An enterprising woman rented a studio in the town and invited the women in the community to share their skills with each other. After a year of creative labor, their crafts were sold at three bazaars at Christmas time.

The response was tremendous. While there are now fewer women from the farms, members come from all over to learn old and new crafts from experienced instructors, and to meet their friends. The bazaars continue to draw huge crowds as the work is outstanding.

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## Dig Downingtown Pennsylvania Recreation Department

A member of the staff of the recreation department developed an idea for sponsoring an intergenerational playground for junior high school students and people over 60. The idea was to mix the generations in a relaxed playground setting where all could have fun and learn from each other.

They established a Dig Advisory Board, asking interested people to participate. Two junior high school students were added as advisors. Talks about the project to citizens groups and seniors heightened the interest.

They expected 30 participants; 40 arrived and many more came the next day. Frisbees, checkers, theatre performances, arts and crafts and other programs made the days a lot of fun. The mixing had to be helped by the juniors inviting the seniors to have lunch with them. From then on everyone got into the act. A film was shown. Radio concerts were enjoyed by all. The community paid expenses. An October reunion brought new members out, all asking: "Will it happen again next year?"

## **Opportunities for seniors to become involved**

These are just a few of the services that seniors are giving or would like to give. The craft list is too long to include, the skills too numerous.

### **Teaching Skills**

- Languages
- Public speaking
- Nutrition
- Bookkeeping
- Clock repairs
- Antiques
- Health and personal hygiene
- Leadership and organization
- Retirement planning
- Trades
- Heritage and history
- Farm skills
- Tours and geological digs, etc.
- Work with churches
- Canvassing
- Wheelchair service
- Church nurseries
- Setting up a library
- Board participation
- Speakers

### **Skills**

- Curling
- Bird watching
- Stamp collecting
- Reading groups
- Music
- Travel

### **Organizational skills**

- Discussion group
- Tour guide
- Surveys
- Advising on purchasing and altering clothes
- Setting up files

### **Knowledge and social skills**

- Choir
- Dancing
- Radio operation
- Knowledge of law
- Pensions
- Income tax
- Wills
- Money management
- Family responsibilities

### **Paid activities**

- Relief services in industry
- Plumbing
- Electrical maintenance
- Sales work
- Child care
- Receptionist
- Home help
- Gardening





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